

Message Text

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PAGE 01 RANGOO 03883 261144Z

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2632

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, BM

SUBJ: ROK AMBASSADOR OPTIMISTIC ABOUT BURMA'S KOREA POLICY

1. AMBASSADOR AHN JIN SAENG, WHO RETURNED RECENTLY FROM A VISIT TO KOREA COINCIDING WITH BURMESE FOREIGN MINISTER HLA PHONE'S VISIT, IS GUARDEDLY OPTIMISTIC THAT BURMA MAY GO BACK TO A POLICY OF ABSTENTION ON FUTURE UNGA VOTES ON KOREA, RATHER THAN (AS IN 1975) SUPPORTING THE HOSTOLE RESOLUTION WITH AN INEFFECTUAL "RESERVATION" FAVORING ROK PARTICIPATION IN NEGOTIATIONS TO REPLACE THE ARMISTICE AGREEMENT.

2. AHN BASES HIS OPTIMISM PARTLY ON THE GENERALLY FAVORABLE IMPRESSION HE BELIEVES THE BURMESE VISITORS RECEIVED FROM THEIR OBSERVATIONS IN KOREA, PARTLY ON THE INTEREST THE BURMESE HAVE BEGUN TO SHOW IN KOREAN TECHNICAL AID, BUT MOSTLY ON A STATE-MENT MADE TO HIM BY U MAUNG MAUNG GYEE, FORMER DIRECTOR GENERAL IN THE MINISTRY, RECENTLY APPOINTED BURMA'S PERMANENT DELEGATE TO THE UN. MAUNG MAUNG GYEE TOLD AHN IN CONFIDENCE THAT THE GUB (PRESUMABLY AT THE CABINET LEVEL) HAD APPROVED INSTRUCTIONS TO THE BURMESE DELEGATION TO THE CURRENT UNGA SESSION TO ABSENT ITSELF FROM THE VOTE IF THE ISSUE CAME UP--WHICH IT DID NOT.

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PAGE 02 RANGOO 03883 261144Z

3. AHN SAYS HE IS CONVINCED THAT MAUNG MAUNG GYEE WAS

TELLING HIM THE TRUTH, AND WE HAVE EVIDENCE FROM OTHER SOURCES THAT THE GUB HAD IN FACT DECIDED TO GO BACK TO ABSTAINING ON BOTH RESOLUTIONS HAD THE ISSUE BEEN PRESENTED. A REVERSAL OF THIS POSITION IN THE FUTURE CANNOT OF COURSE BE RULED OUT. HOWEVER, THERE HAS BEEN SOME EVIDENT IMPROVEMENT IN BURMA'S RELATIONS WITH SEOUL, AS SYMBOLIZED BY THE HLA PHONE VISIT. AHN IS PROUD OF THE SEVERAL-FOLD INCREASE IN TRADE (STILL NEGLIGIBLE IN ABSOLUTE TERMS) THAT HAS OCCURRED DURING HIS TENURE, AND IS INTRIGUED BY THE GUB INTEREST IN TECHNICAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE ROK. AHN HAS HOPES OF PERSUADING HIS GOVERNMENT TO ACCEPT 120 TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL TRAINEES, SOME OF THEM PERHAPS UNDER ARRANGMENTS WITH PRIVATE INDUSTRY. THIS WOULD BE A RADICAL EXPANSION FROM THE EXISTING LEVEL OF UNDER TEN TRAINEES PER ANNUM.

4. IN TIME, GIVEN CONTINUED POOR ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE IN NORTH KOREA (AND QUESTIONABLE DIPLOMATIC PERFORMANCE; NORTH KOREAN DIPLOMATS IN RANGOON HAVE ALLEGEDLY CARRIED ON, ALBEIT IN LESSER DEGREE, SOME OF THE SAME BLACKMARKET ACTIVITIES THAT MADE THEM NOTORIOUS IN SCANDINAVIA), CONTINUED ECONOMIC PROGRESS IN THE SOUTH, AND PERSISTENT CULTIVATION OF BURMA BY SEOUL, BURMA MIGHT BECOME A FAIRLY RELIABLE, THOUGH NOT VERY INFLUENTIAL, ALLY OF THE ROK. BURMA BADLY NEEDS TO EXPAND ITS TRAINING OF TECHNICIANS, BOTH THROUGH BUILDING AND EQUIPPING OF VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS IN BURMA AND THROUGH TRAINING ABROAD, AND IF THE KOREANS CAN PROVIDE ASSISTANCE WITH A SUFFICIENTLY DISINTERESTED MANNER TO AVOID AWAKENING THE GUB ALLERGY TO EXTERNAL PRESSURES, THIS COULD BECOME A BOND. BURMA HAS BEEN RATHER LOYAL TO ISRAEL FOR MANY YEARS BECAUSE OF THE LATTER'S EARLY AID EFFORT. AMBASSADOR AHN IS TEMPERAMENTALLY HIGH-KEY (THE ROK'S FIRST EMISSARY TO WIN A PNG, FROM ZAIRE), BUT THE BURMESE SEEM TO RESPECT HIS FORTHRIGHTNESS, AND HE SEEMS TO HAVE MANAGED KOREAN INTERESTS QUITE SKILLFULLY SO FAR.

OSBORN

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